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John Cabot, the Discoverer of North America, and Sebastian his Son. A Chapter of the Maritime History of England under the Tudors, 1496-1557. By HENRY HARRISSE. (London: B. F. Stevens. 1896. Pp. xi, 503.)

THOUGH M. Harrisse published, some years ago, a large volume, in French, on the Cabots, this new work is really a *new* one rather than a second edition. In fact, the author produces so many documents, unknown before, that we may say without exaggeration that the events relating to the Cabots' expeditions are now first elucidated.

Many historians have written on the same subject, specially since the year 1843, when the famous Cabot's planisphere was discovered. Some believed that this important document would bring a great increase of geographical knowledge; but it is now generally admitted that this has not been the case, as this chart was so imperfectly executed. Nevertheless, it has raised up a new question, interesting for Americans, and specially Canadians: "Did John Cabot make land on the northeastern coast of Cape Breton in 1497?" M. Harrisse deals at length with this question, and he leaves no issue to those who argue that the landfall was here.

The following analysis of M. Harrisse's work will render justice to the author and to his heroes. John Cabot, the discoverer of the American continent, was not a Venetian by birth, as some writers say, but a Genoese. In fact, he had been naturalized as a Venetian, in consequence of a residence of fifteen years, by a unanimous vote of the Senate of Venice, on the 28th of March, 1476. Some writers presume that he was born at Castiglione, in Liguria, others say Chioggia, one of the lagoon islands, but these two assertions are based upon documents of no value. Dr. Puebla, the ambassador of Ferdinand and Isabella to England, also Pedro de Ayala, Puebla's adjunct in the embassy, write that Cabot was a Genoese by birth.

John Cabot was married to a Venetian woman, who followed him to England, and we find it recorded that on the 27th of August, 1497, she was living at Bristol, England, with her children, Lewis, Sebastian, and Sanctus. At that time they were apparently all of age, Sebastian having attained at least the age of twenty-three. Sebastian, therefore, was born in 1474. According to certain English biographers, Sebastian Cabot's native place was in England; this statement carries but little weight, as it seems pretty sure that he was born in Venice. When his father obtained Venetian nationality, in 1476, as already stated, in consequence of a constant residence of fifteen years in Venice, Sebastian must have then been not less than two years old. Many authors say that he was a Venetian, specially Ramusio, Andrea Navagero, Contarini, Oviedo, Peter Martyr, etc.

We are inclined to believe that John Cabot removed from Venice to England in 1490, and previously he visited Portugal and Spain to obtain royal aid to undertake transatlantic discoveries, and also visited Mecca, where he met caravans bringing spice from afar; believing in the sphericity

of the earth, he inferred from their reply that it came originally from the West, whence his project of finding a maritime and shorter route to Cathay.

In the year 1496, Cabot obtained letters-patent from Henry VII. for a voyage of discovery westward. He left Bristol in the beginning of May, 1497, on a small ship called the *Matthew*, manned by eighteen men. When the vessel had reached the west coast of Ireland, it sailed towards the north, then to the west for seven hundred leagues, and reached the mainland. He then sailed along the coast three hundred leagues. Returning to Bristol, Cabot saw two islands to starboard. This is the summary of his first voyage.

Some doubts exist about the date and the place of Cabot's landfall. As to the year, though we find on Sebastian Cabot's planisphere an inscription which sets forth the year 1494, it is generally admitted that it was in 1497. The date, July 24, which appears on the said map, ought to be rejected likewise, as being impossible.

As to Cabot's landfall, we can only presume, but with great probability, that it was on some point of the northeast coast of Labrador. No graphic data on the subject are to be found until forty-seven years after the event (1544), and it is again in the Cabotian planisphere, where, on the extremity of a large peninsula, which we now call Cape Breton Island, we read these words: *Prima tierra vista* — the first land seen. This alleged landfall is not less than five degrees farther south than the landfall must have been in reality. All the cosmographers and chart-makers of Charles V., though supplied directly by Sebastian Cabot in his quality of Pilot-Major, supervisor of the Chair of Cosmography in the *Casa de Contratacion*, and member of the Commission of pilots and geographers, located the first transatlantic discoveries accomplished under the British flag along the region then called Labrador.

The delineations of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the adjoining country depicted in the Cabotian planisphere, have no other origin than the French maps which were constructed in Dieppe after the second or third voyage of Jacques Cartier, and especially the map of Nicolas Desliens (1541). It follows from this last assertion that all the configurations of the islands in the Gulf of St. Lawrence near or about Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick, in Sebastian's planisphere, have and can have no other origin than the cartographical data collected by Jacques Cartier or his pilots. It also follows that Cabot's "Isla de S. Juan," which he claims to have discovered on the 24th of June, 1494 (1497), is only one of the small islands of a group first found and depicted by the French navigator, and named by him "the Isles of sand," the configurations of which Cabot has borrowed wholly from the Cartierian prototype used by Nicolas Desliens for his map of 1541.

The conclusion to be drawn from our analysis is that Sebastian Cabot's statements as regards the first landfall on the continent of North America, are in absolute contradiction to the legends and delineations of the plani-

sphere of 1544, and that these, in their turn, are based entirely on the discoveries made by Jacques Cartier in 1534 and 1536, and not at all on Cabot's. If in connection with these facts, we recollect that for forty-four years previous to the making of his planisphere, all the maps locate the first English discoveries ten degrees farther north ; and that disinterested witnesses testify to having heard Cabot declare that he sailed westward without alluding to a change southward, we feel constrained to place his *prima tierra vista*, in 1497, beyond $51^{\circ} 15'$ north latitude.

What then could be Sebastian's object in placing at the southern entrance of the Gulf of St. Lawrence a landfall which for so many years previous had rightly figured in all charts and portolani, as on the north-eastern coast of Labrador? Was it his personal interest to do so, and have we any reason to consider him as capable of making wilfully untruthful statements? These grave questions require the critic to examine the real character of Sebastian Cabot.

Cabot was a man capable of disguising the truth, whenever it was to his interest to do so. In some accounts given personally of the first voyage which was undertaken by his father, Sebastian Cabot sometimes makes no mention whatever of his father, or he says that his father was only a sort of itinerant merchant, who had come to England solely to sell his goods. We remark that in many instances he contradicts himself and makes erroneous statements and anachronisms.

After his return to Bristol early in August, 1497, John Cabot applied for new letters-patent, which were granted on the 3d of February, 1498. There is no ground for the assertion that John Cabot did not command this second expedition. Pasqualigo and Soncino specify him and no one else, as the person to whom Henry VII. intended to entrust the fleet. Cabot sailed after April 1, 1498. Where and how far did he go? In the chart of Juan de la Cosa drawn in the year 1500, we find the approximative result of his explorations, as far as a region south of the Carolinas. The pretended third transatlantic voyage of Sebastian Cabot under the British flag is only an inference drawn exclusively, and gratuitously, from a remark reported by Stow, who relates that during 1498 Sebastian brought three savages to England. But this testimony is contradicted by documents.

There is no further mention of Sebastian Cabot in any document until ten years after his alleged third transatlantic expedition. It is impossible to find any allusion to voyages undertaken during that time, except a pretended expedition to Brazil, in 1504, but of which there are no traces. He left England after the death of Henry VII. (1509), and came to Spain, where, placing himself at the disposition of King Ferdinand, he gave information on the subject of Bacalaos, or Codfish Country. On October 20, 1512, he was appointed naval captain, and established his residence at Seville. On November 13, 1515, we see Cabot among cosmographers called to ascertain whether the line of demarcation between Spain and Portugal should pass by Cape St. Augustine. In 1518, he was appointed Pilot-Major in the place of Juan Dias de Solis, who had been killed by the

Indians in the Rio de la Plata. The possibility of Cabot having joined an English expedition between 1516 and 1517, at first sight not inadmissible, disappears before the study of the first Atlantic navigations. This voyage of Cabot is a pure hypothesis.

Cabot was in Spain during the years 1522, 1523, and 1524. In 1522, he was intriguing with the Venetian Republic for the purpose of revealing a secret on which depended the future greatness of the Republic. But the project was relinquished, owing probably to a refusal on the part of Spain to grant the necessary leave. About the year 1524, Cabot was appointed leader of an expedition to the Moluccas. Meanwhile he was confirmed in the post of Pilot-Major of Spain. The expedition sailed on the 3d of April, 1526, "to the discovery of the islands of Tharsis, Ophir, and Eastern Cathay," by way of the Strait of Magellan. The landfall on the American continent was effected at the end of June, and somewhat to the north of Pernambuco, where the fleet was detained till the last week of September. Going south, Cabot explored the South American continent till he entered the estuary of the Rio de la Plata, then called Rio de Solis. Cabot seems to have spent the winter of 1528-29 at the fort of San Salvador. In the spring, he went to Sancti Spiritus, and thence to San Salvador. Finally he set sail, homeward bound, early in November, 1529.

Cabot was not a professional mariner. Peter Martyr, his countryman, remarks that there were Spaniards who denied that he had ever discovered Newfoundland or even visited those regions. Oviedo considered him as not possessing an adequate knowledge of the regions to which he undertook to lead ships and men, and, in going to the Moluccas, to have assumed a task for which he was not fitted. His contemporaries saw in him only a theorist, but versed in cosmography and cartography. Men of experience and social position placed no confidence in Cabot, whose science they doubted, or cared little for, and who, in their eyes, was evidently nothing but a foreign adventurer, elevated above them merely through intrigues, vain boasts, and fallacious promises.

Immediately upon landing at Seville, he was arrested and sentenced to four years' banishment, the Crown having charged him with having disobeyed the instructions given to him when he set out from Spain to go to the Molucca Islands. After the return of Charles V. to Spain, Cabot resumed his ancient office of Pilot-Major, and constructed a number of planispheres and globes. Cabot enjoyed a high reputation as a man versed in navigation and cosmography. He published several maps and planispheres, which are lost, except the planisphere dated 1544, which must rank as the most imperfect of all the Spanish maps of the sixteenth century which have reached us; it contains the grossest cartographical and geographical errors.

In our opinion, Cabot owed his great reputation, as a scientist, to a supposed profound knowledge of the mariner's compass. Many writers even ascribe to him the discovery of both the declination and the variation of the magnetic needle. In fact, Cabot discovered neither, nor indeed

anything useful or practical relative to the same, his own boasts to that effect notwithstanding. He occupied himself with the problem of finding the longitude at sea, and he boldly asserted that he had discovered its solution, not only by means of the variation of the magnetic needle, but also by the declination of the sun, but both methods are useless and erroneous. The same idea must be entertained of his nautical theories and sailing directions.

In the year 1548, Cabot left Spain, "to serve and inhabit in England," where "he would seem to have exercised a general supervision over the maritime concerns of the country." Being brought in contact with the Merchant Adventurers, Cabot suggested to them the route to Cathay by the northeast, and in the year 1553 an expedition was directed to Cathay, which was unsuccessful. Cabot retired from public life in the winter of 1556-57. London is doubtless the place where he died; but the year of his death is yet unknown. Diligent researches have been instituted in Worcester (where the early Bristol Registers are preserved) and in London, to discover his last will, but in vain, thus far.

Cabot was married to a Spanish girl called Catalina Medrano, who was still living in 1533. When yet living in England, Cabot had a daughter, probably by a first marriage with an Englishwoman. As to his brothers, Sanctus and Lewis, no traces are found of either of them after the year 1497, when they were living at Bristol with their mother. Some families from Normandy and Languedoc claim kinship to Sebastian Cabot. The Cabots de la Fare, in the south of France, set forth, in 1829, their genealogical pretensions before the courts. They strove to establish that Peter Cabot was son of Lewis, son of John, the navigator. Peter Cabot lived in Saint-Paul-la-Coste, and he said in his testament that his descent from John Cabot is duly established. But the aforesaid testament does not exist.

N.-E. DIONNE.

The Growth of British Policy, An Historical Essay. By Sir J. R. SEELEY, Litt. D., K.C.M.G., formerly Regius Professor of Modern History in the University of Cambridge. (New York: Macmillan and Co. 1895. Two vols., pp. xxiv, 436, 403.)

The History of the Foreign Policy of Great Britain. By MONTAGU BURROWS, Chichele Professor of Modern History in the University of Oxford. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1895. Pp. xiv, 372.)

WHAT is Seeley's place among English historians? Is he destined to rank at all among the historical scholars of his generation? Or will he be considered in the future as a brilliant writer and accomplished man of letters whom Fate placed in the chair of history at the University of Cambridge, and who was thus induced to devote his attention to the composition of volumes of history? These are questions naturally suggested by